

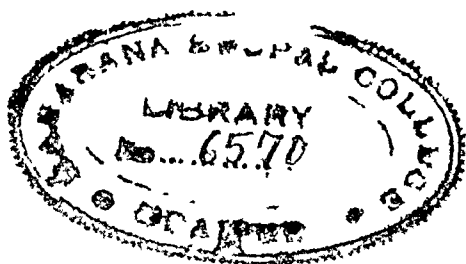
**THE
SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS**

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

SIR WILLIAM WATSON



HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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PREFACE

To prevent even a possibility of misunderstanding, it seems best to indicate briefly here the precise extent of my indebtedness, in *The Super-human Antagonists*, to ancient Persian mythology. It is soon stated. I have borrowed from that mythology its fundamental idea : the idea of a world ruled by two mutually hostile beings, Ormazd and Ahriman, the Good and the Evil Spirit : and I have brought into my story, with sufficient modification of their native attributes, three of the many divinities or demigods who in the Zend-Avesta are pictured as revolving about the central figure of Ormazd, the all-beneficent. That is the full account of my obligation.

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The narrative which I have woven around these personages is my own invention, and the credit or discredit of it must be borne solely by me. Moreover, while drawing upon the plentiful if somewhat unchastened resources of this Mid-Eastern Pantheon to the extent here stated, I have not, where only its minor elements are concerned, bound myself to any scrupulous observance of its constitution or composition. Its cardinal and governing conception is of profound and imposing significance, but its incidental features have not the same grandeur, and with regard to these I have used such liberty as the traditional prerogative of the Poet seemed to sanction. Perhaps I ought to add, that while adopting for my purposes, in its main general outline, an archaic creed, I have not thought it necessary to hamper myself with a primitive cos-

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mography, preferring to accept as a framework the verified Universe in which fancy, after all, has liberal room for play.

In the word *Ormazd* I have chosen the form favoured by the most modern scholarship, in preference to others heretofore current; not that I am competent to hold any opinion as to its relative accuracy, but because in point of sound it seems to commend itself better to English ears.

And now I take occasion to say, with what the reader may if he choose call egotism, that this poem, whatever it achieves, at any rate attempts no mean or slight things; and though I have written it in about six hundred lines, it could perhaps have been written more easily and more quickly in twice or thrice that number. A few months hence it will be just forty years since I carried to a then pro-

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minent publisher, since deceased, the manuscript of my first book. *The Prince's Quest* was written in the same metre as *The Superhuman Antagonists* : both belong to the region of fantasy : but in methods of workmanship, as well as in those matters which lie nearer to the springs of thought and feeling, they are perhaps as little related as any two productions from the same hand and brain could be. Forty years, as I have said, separate them : forty years of a far from bookish life, in which I have seen something of many countries, have counted among my friends many famous persons, have known very varied fortunes, have had memorable and great experiences, and have lived intensely through much peace and war. Yet at the end of these four decades, and in the poem now being put forth—a poem written with un-

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hasty pen, mainly among the majestic English mountains, partly on the lovely Irish coast, with my young children growing beside me as it grew —I find myself once more dwelling in an atmosphere of romantic idealism akin to optimistic faith. It is an atmosphere which to some eyes may seem to take on illusive colours, but it has at all events nothing in it that can deaden or enervate, and while it does not chill, neither does it fever. Perhaps it may sometimes even brace and hearten, and to do so is surely Poetry's own noblest office. For Poetry should without doubt gratify the sense, but it should also fortify the soul, and the degree in which it harmonises these functions and performs them with power is the measure of its true and enduring worth.

A word as to the lesser poems in this volume. Most of them have

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already appeared in reviews, magazines or the daily press. The poem acclaiming America's intervention in the war, and the one in which Ireland's mood of detachment from that struggle is lamented, were first published when their respective themes were engaging general attention. They are now reprinted without essential change.

W. W.

April 1919.

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THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

ORMAZD, the Spirit of Light, the
Spirit of Good,
{ Their father, glorying in his father-
hood—
Maker of Joy, and of all blissful
things—
Once, in mid pomp of his world-
journeyings
Across the invisible viaducts of
Space
That lead from star to star, came face
to face
With him from whom all Guilt, all
Error known,
All that is misbegotten or misgrown,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Pain without ease, toil without wage
or end,

And sin without delight, darkly
descend :

Him in whom falsehood and curst
greed began :

Evil's great founder, loveless Ahriman.

For he too had roamed forth that
day, the sire
Of the world's tears; and bringing
spectres dire

To attend him, Hates and Lusts of
every hue,

He, as it chanced, with all his re-
tinue,

Far roving from his cavernous abode,
Travelled that selfsame interstellar
road,

That crosses the calm vasts, and runs
unseen

Through the hushed voids, and spans
the deeps serene.

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

A secret highway, it was made of old,
Long ere the passions of the moon
 were cold,
Though in no chart of heaven 'tis
 figured yet :
And on that road the mighty rivals met.

Then did they pause : then did all
 Good and Ill
Seem for a moment to stand mute and
 still.
And as a thundercloud, a wandering
 gloom,
Full of the whirlwind, full of sudden
 doom,
Might hover, holding back its bolts
 unflung,
So hovered Ahriman. But apt of
 tongue,
Quickly he scabbarded fierce hate in
 guile,
And hailed bright Ormazd : 'Thou
 benignant Smile,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Mellowing the countenance of Eternity!
Oft on thy works I gazed : on very
thee

I gaze at last. O falsely famed to
dwell

Withdraw ³ into thy towering citadel
In most remote austerity of brow !
Ev'n thus did I, too, image thee ere
now—

A clifflike, steep Perfection. At this
hour,

Seeing thee as thou art, in blandest
power

Accessible as Spring and Morning are,
I will unlatch my breast, I will unbar
This heart of mine, I will let leap
unpent

The Thought that hungered for en-
franchisement,

Prisoned while many an age hath
ebbed and gone !

Have I thine ear ?' And Ormazd
said : ' Say on.'

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

So Ahriman, as one that halts no
more,
But with large gesture opes a captive's
door,
Thus from his bosom set the bound
thought free :
' Ormazd the Radiant ! betwixt thee
and me
Shared is the world : in its august
design
Everything everywhere is thine or
mine :
And throned o'er all that can rejoice
or mourn,
We are the lords of Life from bourn
to bourn.
But so enclasped,—nay, through their
farthest range
Knotted together in a knot so strange
Are our dominions, each with each
entailed
Even from the prime ; so twined, so
intercoiled—

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Locked in a tanglement so hard to
undo—

So wholly intermingled through and
through—

Are these our realms ; that nowhere
within all

Their vastness is one point, however
small,

One meanest spot, where thou or I can
say :

*Here have I absolute and plenary sway,
Complete, unparcelled lordship, king-
hood whole ;*

*Here do I reign, sovereign, supreme, and
sole.*

Rather have mutual thwartings long
made sour

Each cup we drank of ! And is this,
then, Power—

Can this be rule and governance—to
bear

Frustration with a meek brow every-
where,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

And unto bafflings without end resign
A patient breast ? For such thy wont,
and mine.

Ever, O Ormazd, thou art foiled by me ;
Ever, O Ormazd, I am baulked by
thee ;

And everywhere in our domains im-
mense
Is balanced Might but grandiose im-
potence.

Behold, then, this my Scheme, in
silence nursed,
In secrecy long pondered, and now
first,
Under the calm, grave inquest of thine
eye,
Bid to stand naked : the one Scheme
whereby
Huge discords shall be goldenly re-
solved,
And fair and foul cease to be inter-
volved,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

While from a heaven uncobwebbed
thou shalt see

These ravelled worlds blaze with simplicity,

The accurst embroilments and rank
disarray

Wholly thenceforward swept from life
away.

For now my Scheme, my slow-nurtured
Design,

Shall forthwith to that cloudless gaze
of thine

Be bared. But though it proffers
wondrous things,

They are no more than rich imaginings
Till thy command shall make them
truth, and give

The charter that empowers a dream to
live.

Behold my Project, then! Let thee
and me

On a world-boundary now at last
agree :

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

A barrier, so devised as to extend,
With neither a beginning nor an end,
Along a line throughout Creation
drawn,
Straight as if Nature's self must then
be sawn
In bleeding halves ; and let this
barrier reach—
Being of impalpable fabric—without
breach,
Mid worlds long weary of our clamor-
ous feud,
Upward and downward through in-
finitude,
Mystically, and therefore, as were meet,
Invisibly ; and when 'tis built com-
plete,
All that is on the one side thou shalt
make
Thine own for evermore, and I will take
All that is on the other : and thus
shall we
Divide with a Divine equality

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Betwixt us twain from that time forth
the whole
Of Being, and equitably allot its
soul
And substance, past contention. Then
must these
Rangers of heaven, that with proud
scorn of ease
In many a wheeling orbit wander
wide,
Quit their old paths for ways as yet
untried,
If in their courses they would else
transgress
That Confine's subtle ethereal fixedness,
And with disorder beyond remedy
mar
Our Scheme. For so must even planet
and star
Yield them to change, and to a new-
framed sky
Conform, or perish. Meanwhile thou
and I

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Have but to ordain it, and with lesser
sound

Than of the grass breaking from out
the ground

There shall be fashioned as by secret
hands

That bodiless mystic barrier, till it
stands

Ungross as air and unbeheld as thought,
Cleaving a universe thenceforth dis-
traught

No more with our hoarse conflicts, no
more shamed

By our crude strifes ; and it shall be
proclaimed

The everlasting bound, that must
alone

Part thy dominions, Ormazd, from
mine own.

On *that* side of the guarded frontier,
thine

Shall be the only law ; on *this* side,
mine.

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

And *there* let all Good dwell, thy consort,
here

All Evil live, my spouse. Then without peer

On that side rule thou changeless, I
on this :

And if to wield pure sovereignty be bliss,
Bliss shalt thou have and hold, there
reigning ! Yea,

There for the first time shalt thou
truly sway

Thy princedoms, and with hate be
hemmed not round,

And with no harassed and mock crown
be crowned.

There for the first time since the birth
of things,

Or since the blind and thunderous
labourings

Of the unborn world to be brought
forth at all,

Shalt thou whose lips have tasted but
the gall

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Of doubtful empire, slake thee with
 delight
 Of perfect puissance, never-threatened
 Might,—
 None to dispute thy throne, nothing
 to gnaw
 At its deep bulwarks,—greatness with-
 out flaw,—
 None to make vain thine acts and
 pluck away
 With midnight hand what thou didst
 plant by day,—
 None to oppose thee, nothing to im-
 pede,
 And thou at last for ever lord indeed.'

He ceased, and looked to Ormazd
 for some sign,
 Legible haply in that brow benign,
 Or those calm eyes. But nothing
 there he read ;
 And the pure lips of Ormazd simply
 said,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

With suchlike thrift in words as let
no trace

Of aught that was more inward haunt
his face :

‘ What thou proposest I will duly
weigh,

And duly shalt thou have my Yea or
Nay.’

‘ And who shall bear thy word unto
mine ear ? ’

Said Ahriman ; ‘ and by what token
clear

Am I to know him sent indeed from
thee,

Right across desolate immensity ?

Where in the world-sweep of thy
boundless ken

Shall I await his coming ? And O
when

Shall I behold him verily at hand,

With thy great message ? ’ Then did
Ormazd stand

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Silent, the monstrous silence of the sky
Dwarfed by his own. Fathomless was

his eye,

His face the cloister of his thoughts,
his head

A still, lone summit. But at length
he said :

‘ No messenger shall bear to thee my
word ;

Only from mine own mouth shall it be
heard.

Where, dost thou ask ? Here, where
we parley now,

My tongue shall speak it. When,
demandest thou ?

A hundred thousand years hence,
from this hour.’

To Spirits of heavenly or infernal
power,

Such as in ancientness are Time’s own
peers,

Not longer seem a hundred thousand
years,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

With their dim-moving pomps of life
and death,

Than is to us a moment or a
breath.

And the dark ancestor of all things
vile

Being well content to wait so brief a
while,

The rivals parted, pledged to meet
once more,

Soon as those few swift ages should be
o'er.

To Night's blind heart returned the
Spirit of Ill,

Where gloomed his fastness, whence
he roams at will

To mar that Good he may not quite
destroy.

And he who fashioned Morn and
founded Joy

Betook him to a region of the skies
That from the gaze of men is hidden,
and lies

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Outside the lore that can bewitch our
ears

With the proud epic of the stars'
careers.

There did the heavenly traveller halt ;
and there,

Seeming to rest upbuilt on golden air,
Were vast walls, whiter than in storm
the foam

Round fear-struck ships ; and many a
lustrous dome

Rose as the curving bosom of the swan
Above a still lake rises. There, too,
shone

Turrets that, mounting firelike, seemed
to be

Ravished and lost in a pure ecstasy,
So high they flamed ; while near them,
luminous mist,

Its hues the marriage of the amethyst
And opal, floated as amid the play
Of plashing fountains floats the rain-
bowed spray.

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

And splendour beyond splendour
 towered, yet all
The glories bounded by that circling wall
Were one miraculous palace that
 appeared
As if a wizard of the heavens had
 reared
Its ageless pomps. Never therein had
 been
Death, or his shadow; and with
 dazzling sheen,
Gateways through which no evil thing
 might fare
Blazed around Ormazd as he entered
 there.
For this was his far dwelling, which
 decay
Touched not, and tarnish visited not;
 and they
Who had kept solemn watch and sleep-
 less ward,
Flung wide its portals to receive their
 lord.

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Gorgeous the web of wonder that is
 spun
Out of the spilth and offcast of the sun ;
Glorious the tropic noon's unbridled
 light ;
Glorious the pageant of the arctic
 night,
That for an hour perchance may half
 console
The ice-barred voyager hopeless of the
 Pole.
But nought are all the splendours
 Earth hath known,
To that which shook, from round the
 blinding throne
Where Ormazd seated him again on
 high,
Tempests of radiance to the burnished
 sky.

And now unto his presence did he call
Three lordly minds, illustrious among
 all

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

That compassed him as with strong
ramparts : three
Not far below himself in majesty,
Rashnu and Vayu and great Mithra, sons
Of light and might, his seeing and
judging ones,
Also his warlike captains from of old :
To whom he failed not straightway to
unfold
Ahriman's Scheme, by which that
Prince of Pain
Would carve the labyrinthine world in
twain,
Parting, as with a barrier none might
climb,
All Evil from all Good throughout all
time ;
And Ahriman's whole plea did he
rehearse
For such a halving of the universe.
They harkened, on each word and tone
intent,
Standing before him proudly reverent,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

In silence, till their counsel was besought,
When Vayu was the first to unseal his thought.

‘ Let me not with a niggard tongue
refuse ’
(’Twas thus he spake) ‘ its just, its
rightful dues
To this world-spacious world-remould-
ing Plan,
Born of the cloud-girt mind of Ahri-
man.
Under this Scheme, no more might
fairest Good,
From the infecting touch and neigh-
bourhood
Of Evil, suffer transformation strange,
Take Evil’s hues and into Evil
change ;
For strict impassable confines being set
’Twixt these that oft in a fell freedom
met,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Such woes would cease for ever. And
perchance

Evil itself, lacking the sustenance

It sucks from Good,—denied its banquetings

Mid the lorn ruins of once blissful things,—

Would sicken and fail, pining with countenance wan

For that rich fare it had long feasted on.

But whether Good, shorn of the strength it draws

From hourly battle with Evil's fangs and claws,

And from uncounted clashings, 'hard to endure,

With the huge monster's dragon armature,

Would flourish or fade, richer or poorer grow,

Rise with new fire, or smoulder lulled and low

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

And in a barren peace at last abide,—
Of *that*, O Ormazd, thou that stood'st
 beside
Time at his cradling must forejudge,
 not we :
Thou who didst know from their
 nativity
Both Good and Evil, seeing their wars
 begun,
And ever won and lost, and lost and
 won.'

Reverberant, vibrant, nor less broad
 and deep
Than the sea's utterance round the
 cloven steep,
Was his rich-billowing voice, each
 cadence grave
Being like the lapse of a sonorous wave
When it withdraws down a resounding
 shore.
And after his last word, there hovered
 o'er

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

That council a brief silence, tremulous
As with expectancy, till Rashnu
thus

Put it to flight : ' One only thing is
plain.

Not *our* advantage, not *our* weal or
gain,

O Ormazd, doth thy foe of foes in-
tend !

What, then, can be his goal, his secret
end ?

What lurked behind his specious words,
when he,

As if by veriest chance encountering
thee

Amid the heavens, poured forth the
Scheme which thou

Bid'st us consider ? Is it that he
now

Foresees his empire slowly dwindling,
thine

Greatening, and seeks to avert by this
design

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS.

That gradual droop of power, that
piecemeal fall,
And long, inglorious fading, which of all
Dreary vicissitude is the dreariest
known,
To one that sits upon a haughty
throne ? ' ~

So asked the noon-bright Spirit,
and when he ceased
To speak, although no tongue replied,
at least
Faces made answer ; and in speech to
the eye
His fellow counsellors there standing
nigh
Uttered what seemed not an uncertain
Yea.
Then spake outright the lordliest child
of day ;
He in whom met, and nobly did agree,
Resplendent strength and mastering
suavity ;

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

He at whose footfall, when he roamed
abroad,
The heavens themselves were stilled
and hushed and awed,
Hearing the golden thunder of his tread;
Great Mithra. 'First, let me declare,'
he said,
'How full, how perfect is mine own
assent
To all that hath from lips more
eloquent
Most justly flowed. Like Vayu, loth
am I
With a mean stint to grudge and half
deny
Fit and due praise to a Project, to a
Scheme,
Which, were it proved but a vain-
builded dream,
Would none the less reveal, if nought
beside,
A dauntless Dreamer : being a vision
wide

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

As the mind's farthest outstretch :
 wanting not
Its lures, its beckon, its promises of
 what
Ev'n the all-coveting hand of Hope
 might well
Have lacked the greed to crave. But
 truth to tell,
I also must like Rashnu cry Beware !
For it is warrior's wisdom, when-
 soe'er
A foe seems friendliest, to set double
 guard,
And at an enemy's gift look long and
 hard.
Now 'tis exceeding sure, that till we
 know
Whether thyself, O Ormazd, or thy
 foe
Already wield o'er life the ampler
 power,
And in these clangorous worlds at
 each loud hour

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Already govern the more vast domain,
We know not whether 'twere thy loss
or gain

To embrace a Project, fix and ratify
Beyond revokement a Design, whereby
The Dark One would in breadth of
empire be

Thy changeless Equal everlastingly,
And thine own puissance an arrested
tide,

Standing magnificently petrified.

Send therefore to each haunt and
dwelling-place

Of Mind—each tenanted orb that rides
in Space—

Each populous busy star that sails
upbuoyed,

Eager and ardent on the torpid
Void—

Send to all seats of life, and through
the whole

Compass and circuit of that world of
soul

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

That in a fast enmeshment without
end

Deep amidst worlds of clay is woven—
send

Unseen and noiseless watchers,
searchers, spies,

A myriad listening ears and probing
eyes,

And bid them bring thee word from
everywhere

Of how thine enemy's strength and
thine compare ;

In what sphere *thou* prevailest ; in
what zone

And tract of Being *his* might o'ertops
thine own ;

What wavering region of vext ebb
and flow

Now hails *thee* paramount and anon
thy foe.

In brief, from wheresoever living
thing

Abides, let thine intelligencers bring

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Knowledge that, summed into one
 boundless ray,
Shall show forth clear how thou dost
 stand to-day,
Measured against thine adversary;
 and so,
In that enormous torchflare, we shall
 know
Whether 'twill profit *thee* or him alone,
Who at the heart of darkness hath his
 throne,
If thou, unto his Scheme consenting,
 cast
Off and make null and quite tread out
 the Past,
Bartering this variable and fluctuant
 sway—
Surge and subsidence, crescence and
 decay—
For an unchanging Realm, within
 whose pale
Nowhere shalt thou have reason to
 bewail

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Evil triumphant, and its arms made
proud
With trophy and spoil ; or to rejoice
aloud
At its abjection, and its flight in fear
Before the gleaming of a dawn-tipt
spear.'

Such were his words ; and now, in
speech that fell
From where no shadow of untruth
might dwell,
Ormazd's elect and faithful had out-
poured
Freely their thought, which in their
breasts to hoard
Had been ignoblest service ; and the
three,
For their oft-proved and spotless fealty,
Received the thanks of that enthroned
and crowned
Benignance. Then, from where the
glory around

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

His presence like the soul of dayspring
burned,
They to a thousand radiant tasks re-
turned.

And Ormazd did as Mithra coun-
selled. First
Recalling hosts that had been long
dispersed
On divers errands, diligent spirits and
true,
He formed them into bands and squad-
rons new,
And with new mandate sent them
everywhere
Among the speedful, spurring worlds ;
and there,
Wherever the dim lifeseed had been
sown
In quickened soil, or on waste foam or
stone ;

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Wherever aught had breath, and did
 beget
Offspring, and wither and die ; and
 chiefliest yet,
Wherever creatures born, not quite in
 vain,
To a broad estate of pleasure and of
 pain,
Large hereditaments of bliss and
 woe—
Wherever such a race, emerging
 slow,
Had risen in honour and shame and
 love and lust
Out of the pregnant and parturient
 dust,
There did those secret emissaries en-
 gage
In a profound, a solemn espionage.
None saw them ; yet among the quick
 and dead
Daily they moved, with a reposeless
 tread,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

And they became a presence inter-
wreathed
With all that was ; by everything that
breathed
Felt like a vague commotion, like a
breeze
Furtive in underwoods where forest
trees
Stand pensive. And with questing
eyes and ears
They, traversing the divers peopled
spheres,
Passed to and fro ; the mortals dwell-
ing there
Being oft obscurely on a sudden
aware
Of something which had opened not
their doors,
And had no step that sounded on their
floors,
But fainter than a rustle or a sigh
Had glided in, and like a waft gone
by.

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

And ages came and went, with pause-
less pace
And trampling on sweep, till the very
face
Of heaven was here and there by slow
degrees
Being changed ! Young planets, the
shy novices
Of Night, appeared beside old palsied
ones,
Their joyless kin ; while certain fervid
suns
Grew senile, and with no more force
to spend
Doted decrepit, nearing their lone
end :
And sometimes, as from fires that
blanch and char,
There fell the ashes of a ruined star.
And still did the unslumbering
searchers ply
Their task ; and not till they had
heard pass by,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Which was the greater : whereupon
 he cast
Falterings behind him, and stood
 founded fast
In a resolve that might not change or
 fade,
Touching the answer that must soon
 be made,
At the appointed place and destined
 day,
To Ahriman—the doomful Yea or Nay.

For now that day drew near, and
 peaklike rose
Out of the plains of time—the day
 when those
First mighty forefathers of Good and Ill
Must indeed meet once more, and so
 fulfil
Their mutual pledge, or both for ever
 stand
Alike forsworn. And ere it loomed at
 hand,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Ormazd together called, besides the
Three
Nighest himself in splendour and
. majesty,
Thrice three of less renown ; and on
each one
Bestowing words of cheer and benison,
He to the twelve made known his
whole intent.
And at a sign they left him, and he
went
From out his lofty-towered abiding-
place,
And he looked down o'er the abysm of
Space,
He whom its deeps were powerless to
appal.
O'er Nothingness, most awesome thing
of all,
There looked he down ; and halted on
its verge,
Somewhat as on a rock above the
surge

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

A fearless swimmer a moment halts,
ere he

With headlong leap commits him to
the sea.

Then from the towers and courts and
domes that glowed

Around his innermost divine abode—
The outskirts of that Light which was
his throne—

Ormazd upon the skies went forth
alone,

There, for the second time, and for
the last,

To meet the Saddener of the World.
He passed

By many a massy star, matched with
whose girth

Puny indeed were this our boastful
Earth,

And onward without tarrying or de-
lay,

Right across many a planet's ancient
way,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

His own being no such curving course,
he fared.

The ever fevered comet as it
flared

With violent inroad through the
heavens, and raced

Athwart Creation, he that knew not
haste

Serenely in its hot flight overtook
And far outsped. As one that fords
a brook

In a mere journey o'er vale and wold,
he crossed

The madding meteor torrent, that
seemed lost

And aimless, doomed to chase in
dizzy sky

Its own self round the sun. At times
his eye

Saw War beside his pathway, cosmic
strife

As of a new world crashing into
life

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Through welter and rage and the loud
splintering

Of old worlds' bones. But oft, where
breathing thing

Or living voice had never sought to
intrude

On the cold, blank, tremendous
quietude,

He swept through utter Calms that
well might be

Likened to the immense serenity

And infinite composure of the dead :

Kingdoms that Silence hath inherited

From Silence ; and mid these he came
to where

His adversary awaited him, for there,

True to the hour and to the place of tryst,

Was Ahriman, his dread antagonist.

And Ormazd with a soaring voice
cried : ' Lo,

I am come to pay thee that which I do
owe—

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Gratitude, gratitude ! ' A joyful
gleam
Lit the drear face of Evil. ' Then my
Scheme
Hath in thine eyes found favour ? '
But full soon
The gleam departed, Ormazd saying :
' The boon
For which I thank thee and could
almost bless
The giver of a gift so measureless,
Is the new knowledge, full and sure, of
how
Thy power and mine compare, and
whether thou
Or I be mightier. Unto thee my
debt
Is boundless : without *thee*, not even
yet
That knowledge had been mine, and
thou hast well
Earned richest thanks.' Ahrimán's
countenance fell.

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

' I knew that thou hadst sent forth
everywhere

Thy searchers, gatherers, scouts, and
spies, and ne'er

Sought I to foil their quest, nor once
have laid

Across their path a hindrance.' Or-
mazd paid

No heed, but unregardful thus spake
on :

' O oft did I in yonder ages gone
Toil with misgiving and with doubt,
nor knew

Whether 'twas mine own realm or
thine that grew

In lasting spaciousness, or whether
both

Stood without movement, without
change or growth,

Or rise or fall. And ever labouring
still,

I was as one that climbs an endless
hill,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

And oft I bore a heavy, a secret
load,
And lacked the joy that I myself be-
stowed.
But now I know that when thou met'st
me first,
Thinking to snare me with thy guile
accurst,
Already had thy feet begun to slide
Ev'n then from power. Already had
the tide
Against thee turned : thenceforth the
flow was mine,
Thine the loathed ebb. And though
thy sure decline
Was hardly as yet a thing to itself
confessed,
Already somewhat below peak and
crest
Thou stood'st, and wert each morrow
fall'n away
A little—a little—from height of yester-
day.'

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

‘Thy words are false,’ cried Ahri-
man, ‘and thou
Ere long shalt learn that never even
now
Have I put forth the full might of
mine arm
Against thee; and with tremors of
alarm
Shalt thou look on hereafter, while I
sow
With dreadful largesse the long-
hoarded woe.
For whatsoever thou dost most
abhor—
Famine and pestilence and hate and
war,
And new-minted diseases worse than
death—
These in thrice ampler bounty with my
breath
Will I strew wide, wherever mortals
live
Their life fantastical and fugitive.’

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

‘ And from all this,’ said Ormazd,
‘ shall pure fruit
Upgrow, and odorously will I trans-
mute
To loveliest bloom thy gifts of deadliest
bane.
For now henceforth I wax and thou
dost wane,
I broaden and thou shrinkest ; and at
length,
With ever leaping heart and freshening
strength,
Joyous I toil, knowing that day by
day
Somewhat art thou for ever feebler ;
yea,
Knowing as happiest truth that ev’n
were I
Not indestructible, but born to die
Like Gods that palely perish, making
room
For younger Gods,—that ev’n were it
my doom

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Thus at the feet of conquering Death
to bow,
And my chief tasks yet unperformed,
and thou
Neither destroyed nor vanquished,—
none the less
Stablisht secure in everlastingness
Were this my kingdom, my fair realm
of Good ;
But thine own realm of Evil, that
withstood
So long my assault, and seemed in
glory and state
Built above dread of fall, shall soon
or late
With pangs of ebbing power, with
shudderings vast,
Be o’ertaken and amazed ; and haply
at last
It shall be broken asunder in ruin
extreme,
Scattered as shards and the ashes of a
dream,

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

And thou, or some like heritor of thy
throne,
Under its mountainous dust lie hurled
and prone.'

So Ormazd spake. But his terrific
foe
In boundless rage was silent, and as
though
Somewhat abashed by that pure
strength and grace,
Did turn away the tempest of his
face.
Out of him rose a twilight dim and
dire,
The clouds and column'd vapours of
his ire
Spreading their dusk afar. Half hid
with these
He stood, while, swirled as in mad
vortices
Above him, an innumerable swarm
Of horrors without lineament or form

THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

Circled aloft and blindly eddying spun,
Black as a flight of crows against the
sun.

And he, by that foul brood attended,
passed

Downward through skies that his
mere frown o'ercast,

Betaking him in fury and in shame
Back to those holds of midnight
whence he came.

AMERICANS, HAIL !

Full of the marrow and the sap of
life,

Full of the tingle of youth and maiden
valour.

You come as Spring comes to the
winter fields

When she has hovered long betwixt
' I will '

And many a coy ' I will not ' ; for
even so

You hovered, halting betwixt ' Yea '
and ' Nay '—

Then thundered ' Yea ' and hurled
your doubts afar.

And not more beautiful upon the
mountains

Were ever yet the feet of him that
brought

Glad tidings, than your prows upon
the sea.

Fresh and untired, you find this
host of ours

AMERICANS, HAIL !

Worn with the burden and stress of
fight and toil :

A host, though but of yesterday's
begetting,

Already, in blind, deaf hurricane of
battle,

Neither ill tried nor proven an ill match
For foes that in their nursery lisped of
arms :

A host proud of your great copartner-
ship,

Proud of their strong new brothers in
the sword—

That just, that holy, that benignant
sword

Whose purpose and whose goal are
peace : a host

Famously captained by such chiefs of
war

As well might seem the very topmost
reach

Of God's own happy art in making
men.

AMERICANS, HAIL !

And yet, not to the heroes, fighting
there
On strangers' soil—or underneath it
laid—
Not to the brave that face yon storms
of fire,
Be all the laurel, all the glory and
praise !
Here, too, is greatness ; here are heads
grown grey
In council, not yet dreaming of repose ;
Here are the athletes of debate, and
here
The brains that are the lamps without
whose light
Armies would grope and stumble, and
noblest prowess
With a waste splendour dazzle a fruit-
less field.
Here also, his hot thirst for toil un-
slaked,
The sinews of his lithe mind unre-
laxed,

AMERICANS, HAIL !

Is he, our Empire's leader : he who
set

The wheels of the machine of victory
Whirring and spinning throughout all
this isle,

Till Britain hummed as one great mill
of war :

A man, no wraith or shadow ; a live
man,

Loathed by the spectres and the
counterfeits ;

A man as human as your Lincoln was,
Not muffled up in formula and phrase,
With palisaded spirit, but giving us
Access and entrance to his hopes and
fears,

And in companionship of glorious
hazard

Bearing us with him, while he treads
a road

Built like a causeway across flaming
Hell ;

Himself a flame of ardour and resolve,

AMERICANS, HAIL !

Beset by all the tempests, but un-
quenched;
Being used to blasts, and native to the
storm,
And thriving on the thunder from his
prime.

Ours were the shame, if having such
a leader
We proved unworthy at last to be so
led,
And lowered the flag of an unshaken
will,
And stooped our soul to a stature and
a posture
Like theirs who preach a base truck
with the foe ;
Theirs who desire not to see wicked-
ness
Caught in the noose of its own vile
intent,
But hunger for that evil thing, a pact
With evil, nay, a bargain with this pit

AMERICANS, HAIL !

That vomiting all putrescence has
o'erflowed

On the sweet earth, a treaty with this
slime ;

Who ask that we betray the spirit of
man,

Defraud the world that looked to you
and us

As guardians of its inward patrimony,
And co-trustees of its estate of freedom.

From all such grovelling counsellors,
and from

The craven mood that in a puissant
people

Were the calamity of calamities

And the one desperate ill, a people
itself

Must be its own sole saviour. But O
friends,

'Twixt whom and us the dark, cold,
salt partitions

Avail not now to intercept the heart,

We have an enemy that amid the once

AMERICANS, HAIL !

Glad vineyards, orchards, and dear
meads of life

Hews at the root of all on earth that
flowered !

It flowers no more, for has not he been
by ?

He found us drowsed and half un-
sentinelled,

Half unaccoutred and unpanoplied,
Lapt in a human trust of human-
kind

And dreaming that himself was human
too.

Fatal, befooling dream ! He spoke
indeed

With human organs, gave forth human
sounds,

Made human gestures, and his melo-
dists

Had fashioned heretofore high human
music,

None fairer and none nobler, and his
poets

AMERICANS, HAIL !

Had thrilled the world with most per-
human song ;

But all his later study and care had
been

To rip from his own breast the human
heart,

And, having rid him of so vain a thing,
To found upon the hideous ghastly
void

The edifice of his thoughts, deeds, and
desires ;

As if upon a hollow and a want
There could arise aught 'stablisht to
endure.

And this, this was not all ! For where
his heart

Had suffered dread erasure, demons
found

Befitting residence and domicile,
And made that cavern in his breast
their home.

Yonder they camp, thence do they
sally abroad,

AMERICANS, HAIL !

No league of Man can compass : less
than this

Would, for ourselves or for our woeful
heirs,

Be but damnation a brief while deferred,

At best a little putting off of fate,

At best a little miserable ease,

And then the paying of all the arrears
of doom,

Vouch'd in remorseless audit ; then
indeed

Ruin and perdition and a world undone.

In that belief, you and ourselves
await,

With hope that cannot wholly vanquish fear,

The veiled, tremendous morrow ; and
yonder stands

Your Nation, watching o'er the sea
her sons ;

AMERICANS, HAIL !

A Nation whence, as from an orchestra
Suavely controlled, there rises goldenly
Though sternly, with far surge and
tidal swell,

Not without sad and wailful underflow,
But mighty in heave of sound, all
dissonance hushed,

A new Heroic Symphony of war ;
Heard throughout Earth with a grave
thankfulness

By such as love great music ; and per-
haps

Ev'n on an ear divine not wholly lost,
Not utterly unacceptable to Heaven.

December 1917.

THE UNRECONCILED

I

IN a crease of the forehead of Antrim,
 where Time has written on stone
The tale of the endless debate of the
 obstinate land and sea—
Those heirs of magnificent discord,
 that just for a season agree
To compose their thunderous quarrel,
 but ever at heart are prone
To harp on it night and day in a
 moody undertone,
And presently mutter a word that is
 dark with wrath and bale,
And rouse from counterfeit sleep their
 fell vendetta, and so
Return to the naked hate they were
 born in long ago,

THE UNRECONCILED

Reopen the wrangle of ages, resume
the dear dispute,
The controversy eternal that bears but
death for fruit,
As well from of old these haughty, im-
placable brawlers know ;—
In a crease of the forehead of Antrim,
where Time has written that
tale,
I have found me a place that surely is
musing on ancient woe,
And remembers in dreams the tread of
the midnight foot of Doom :
A place where even the candours of
noon seem sinister things :
And there I have heard the ocean
recitative roll and boom,
The monotonous ocean soliloquy
rumble morose and low ;
The obscure beginning of storm, like a
rustle of huddled wings ;
The stroke of the great sea-hammer,
awaking with blow on blow

THE UNRECONCILED

In the cavernous land such outcry as
iron from iron wrings ;
The clang of the shock of the waters
that butted with taurine roar
Against fallen Dunseveric, once the
abode of vengeful Kings ;
And the blind, mad panic in heaven
when eastward the hurricane tore
By the marge where lorn Templastra
dejected ponders, and o'er
That fantasy, wild Ballintoy, on the
steeps in the lee of Bengore.

II

And listening there to the sound of
contention fierce, that began
'Mid the Earth's primeval travail, ere
God had dreamed of Man—
Contention ordained to abide when
Man within dust and stone
Shall haply have been forgotten by all
but God alone—

THE UNRECONCILED

I have heard, as a thing far off, the
 voice that is yet as nigh
As the duel of land and sea, beneath
 the impartial sky ;
A richer voice than theirs, and of deep,
 all-human tone ;
Pulsating, vibrating, plangent, a voice
 we dare not fly :
The voice of Ireland's self, for ever
 about our door ;
The voice that beats as a billow on us
 that are the shore.

III

O Ireland, easeless Ireland, how oft
 like yonder tide
Thy soul has arisen, all foam, to break
 on the crags in spray !
And ever the crags endured, and the
 bright spray gleaming died,
And ever as brief iridescence did
 Fortune glimmer away.

THE UNRECONCILED

But to-day shall it still be the
same? Thy heart's abounding
dower

And the wealth of thy spirit, are
these to be spent like a thunder
shower?

Behold, after weary ages of fever and
barren pain,

A cause that is worth thy passion, a
sword that deserves thy hand!

O take them and make them thine.

'Tis the world's transcendent
hour.

'Tis the day of the falling of barriers,
and out on the western main

The interdicts of Ocean themselves are
annulled and vain,

For the daughter of many races, that
long was wont to tower

As the great lone Alp among nations,
serene in mateless power,

At last, her human bosom prevailing,
comes to stand

THE UNRECONCILED

With her kindred, side by side, with
her lovers, heart by heart ;
And is it thy choice at this hour to
hold thee coldly apart,
'To watch from without in the time of
the leaping of chasms unspanned,
When glimpsed amid clouds are the
ways of the World-Deviser, who
planned
How Good shall be born of Evil and
suckled on Evil's breast—
In the time of the drawing together of
continents, east and west,
In the morn of the stormy bridal of
far-cleft land and land,
When the hemispheres brook no longer
their soulless bars unblest ?

IV

Ah, words without hope of fruitage,
like seed on the breakers flung !
But at least I have told my thought, in
faithful if idle speech,

THE UNRECONCILED

That comes not of rage or hatred, and
only of love is sprung.

And now I will hold my peace, I will
husband now my tongue,

I will learn of whatever is voiceless
whatever it has to teach.

The spent tide flags and recoils. Like
gifts unused and waste

Is the many-tinted seaweed that strews
the Atlantic beach.

I will climb the track to westward,
where bards of old have paced,

Whose songs are asleep by cromlech
and cairn and haunted mound.

I will follow the path that leads
to the Way of the Giants,
around

By the Amphitheatre vast, with its
tiers of cliff, where rise

The column'd shafts of basalt like
organ-pipes to the skies,

Outrolling a fugal silence, involved,
impassioned, profound.

THE UNRECONCILED

'Tis the path that gropes and crawls
on the lean rock's wasted side,
Where nightly the Giant's Loom by
invisible hands is plied.
And east and west are the caverns,
their dark roofs arched and
groined,
The chambers and vaulted dungeons
and monstrous crypts of the sea :
And pillars, fallen and prostrate, from
mighty façades disjoined—
Released, but in utter abjection, un-
bound, but vainly free ;
And desolate ruined holds of many a
chief and King ;
And the mastersong of disunion that
earth and ocean sing ;
And large and bold on the headlands
the manuscript of Time ;
And coiled with the roots of the world,
where Life thrusts up like a tree,
The Powers that rive and sunder, un-
moved by appeal or plea ;

THE UNRECONCILED

The Powers that shatter with discord
what else were a golden chime ;
The Estrangeing Ones, the dividers,
the hewers in twain from the
prime ;
The Unmakers and Destroyers, what-
ever their names may be.

September 1917.

THE FORESIGHT OF THE BLIND

THE great, strange, conquering legends
 puissant still
As in the Middle Age whence they
 arose,
Which are they ? Sovereign above
 all are those
Of Faust's dread bargain with the
 Spirit of Ill,
And of that Knight who, taking long
 his fill
Of bliss with Venus, earned him longer
 woes !
And from the Kingdom of our living
 foes
Came both these dreams, mighty to
 haunt and thrill,
And each the tale of a lost soul: as
 though

THE FORESIGHT OF THE BLIND

Germania unawares had prophesied
Of her own state and fate on Earth,
 that sees,
Dark with self-doom, against a fiery
 glow,
The lost soul of a nation, wandering
 wide
Like lone Ahasuerus, without ease.

February 1918.

SONG

THE WARRIOR LOVER

WHEN War's red tempest shall depart,
That long hath sundered me
From those sweet precincts of thy
heart

And all that heaven of thee ;
If I return from where they rest
Whom battle's scythe hath mown,
Then in the fragrance of thy breast
I 'll live for love alone.

But if, where warstorms wildest roll,
My life for *her* I yield—
That other empress of my soul,
Who called me to the field—
Though 'twixt you twain, with dying
breath,
My homage I 'll divide,
My heart will turn to thee in death,
To claim and clasp its bride.

BEHOLD !

O THOU that with a signal canst control

All seas that roll ;

O Thou that with a whisper canst assuage

All winds that rage :

Behold how softer than the human breast

The wild bird's nest !

Behold how calmer than the world of men

The wild beast's den !

March 1918.

TO CERTAIN NEBULAE

PLANET and star, and the glory of
ancient constellations,
These have surfeit of homage, in songs
of a thousand singers :
You, O Nebulae, still, as of old, dwell
yonder songless ;
One in Orion's sword-hilt, one in
Andromeda's girdle,
One like shadowy foam, where sails
a fantastical Argo.
You, mid Arabian cities, and proud
Chaldea, and Egypt,
Mighty astronomers, slowly decipher-
ing Heaven's papyrus,
Oft, no doubt, have watched, in a
world all colour and fruitage,
Balsam, sultry aroma, and odorous
vivid abundance,

TO CERTAIN NEBULAE

Palm, oleander and cedar, acanthus
and lotus and laurel,
Foliage, vintage, plumage, honey and
delicate unguents,
Attar and spices and myrrh. And in
many a nearer region
Many a wandering gaze hath known
your places of ambush,
High above dreams, above tears !
But never a golden greeting
Thither ascends, through space,
through coldly inhuman vast-
ness,
Out of the mouth of a poet, in magical
human numbers.
You, then, far across night, and im-
mense, magnificent silence,
Intricate cosmic coil, and the nodes of
entangled orbits,
Let me salute, O pallid, unsplendid
things, amid splendour
Hovering ever obscure, amid prideful
lustre unprideful :

TO CERTAIN NEBULAE

You that to vague, light ken seem only
as bodiless auras,
Breath of a hundred stars ; but rather
appear unto wisdom
Fringes and shreds of the Veil, through
which, at the Earth's great
moments,
Flashes of God break forth, in the hour
of the smiting of Evil ;
Day of the clang of the axe upon trees
that bore but poison ;
Day of the mortal throes of iniquitous
perishing empires ;
When, upon brows discrowned, the
erasing extinguishing thunders
Fall, and the throne of the cruel is
tossed as a leaf in the whirlwind.

November 1918.

VERSES

TO HENRY C. MONTGOMERY, ESQ.,
OF BELFAST. WRITTEN NEAR
WINDERMERE.

Good friend and true, who, for the
 gifts and knowledge
That stead you well amid the clang
 and strife,
Are less in debt to yonder younger
 College
Than to the University of Life :

Take, at this time that opens the
 heart's fountains,
Take, at this Yuletide, from across
 the seas,
The greetings of the meres and of the
 mountains,
And of your friends who are the
 guests of these.

VERSES TO H. C. MONTGOMERY, ESQ.

Nay, ere my rhyme, that must not
halt or tarry,

Flits through the snowstorm like a
battered dove,

My little firstborn daughter bids it carry,
To her big, bearded playfellow, her
love.

Wild roars the blizzard. Wilder tem-
pest rages

In Man's fierce breast, and hides
from the world's eye

The truthtellers and lightgivers and
sages

That live when hatred and when
fury die.

In this ill day, what good wish shall I
send you ?

Vain, when our fate yet hangs in
quivering doubt,

To ask that all felicity attend you,
And bid you to forget the woe without!

VERSES TO H. C. MONTGOMERY, ESQ.

I can but pray that in some happier
morrow,

You, and we also, gazing from afar,
May look back on this vast, life-blinding
sorrow

As on the occultation of a star,—

A fixed star, briefly hidden by the
passing

Of a reposeless orb of bloodred glow :
Then bursting forth, where Night's
bright hosts were massing,
To pour its glory undimmed, as long
ago.

Christmas 1917.

THE SCROLL OF LIFE

LIFE seems a scroll, not so much darkly
writ

As ill transcribed ; and he who pores
on it

Must, like a painful scholiast, thread
perplext

The thorny thicket of a mangled text.

But with it wov'n is many a quoted
line,—

The cryptic prose breaks into verse
divine ;

And in strange wafts the painful
scholiast hears

Hexameters of the Iliad of the Spheres.

POWER AND CHARM

A COT was ours, lone on a wooded fell
That gazed into a fairy mere renowned.
Dark mountains on our right hand
 camped around ;

Green, on our left, were copse and
 ferny dell.

Thus betwixt Power and Charm we
 abode ; and well

Loved we the brows of Power, with
 silence crowned ;

Yet many a time, when awsomey
 they frowned,

To Charm we turned, with Charm,
 with Charm to dwell.

So have I turned, when overbrooded
 long

By that great star-familiar peak
 austere,

POWER AND CHARM

My Milton's Sinai-Helicon divine,
To some far earthlier singer's earth-
sweet song :
A song frail as the windflower, and as
dear,
With no more purpose than the
eglantine.

THE INNERMOST CAVERN

THE unsailed, the unentered cavern,
The still ungazed upon !
No light but the sea-phosphorescence
Amidst its night hath shone.

Then only it wakes from slumber,
Whenever the visiting gleam
Of the fairy fire of the Ocean
Illumes its secret dream.

For it dreams of space without con-
fines,
Of vastness around and above ;
And it waits like the heart of a maiden,
That waits to be lit by love.

TOIL

LIFE is a workshop and a temple as
well,

Where the great toilers—so their annals
tell—

To Justice, Truth, and Love paid
worship, knowing

Life was a workshop and a temple as
well.

Life is a workshop and a palace
both.

Nature, that ever labours without
sloth,

Nature herself in beauty and grace
hath taught us

Life is a workshop and a palace
both.

TOIL

O be it ours, while hate and feud are
 rife,
To keep far off from this our land the
 strife
 That yonder makes a wreck of Man's
 own dwelling,
His wondrous workshop, temple and
 palace, Life.

THE EARTH'S DESIRE

WHEN a sigh as of abdication is wrung
from lordly things

By the rumour of crumbling pride that
the eve of autumn brings ;

When the troubled splendours come,
and the glad perfections go,
Amid flitting of vagabond tempest
irresolute to and fro ;

‘ Ask, ask thou a boon,’ say the Hea-
vens to the wistful Earth ; but
in vain

She asks for the bliss of the Rose, and
the pomp of the Nightingale’s
pain.

WHITHER AFAR ?

IN light, in night, in twilight,
I sought—I sought for Thee !
But *my* light, was it *Thy* light ?
I sought, and nought could see.

I strove by inward eyesight
To gaze on things to be :
But *my* sight, was it *Thy* sight ?
I gazed, and nought could see.

Along Thy starlit highway
Thou lead'st me, bound or free !
If *my* way, then, be *Thy* way,
O whither lead'st Thou me ?

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